

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

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*"The 'still, small voice' of scientific thought reaches
over continent and ocean to the globe's remotest bound.
The inaudible voice of Truth is, to the human mind,
'as when a lion roareth.'"*

— Mary Baker Eddy

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

CONTENTS

Greater Than Circumstances	3
Why Grow Old?	6
Problem of the Hickory Tree	10
"Songs in the Night"	14

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

GREATER THAN CIRCUMSTANCES

MARCUS AURELIUS said, "Life is more like wrestling than dancing; it must be ready to keep its feet against all onsets, however unexpected." The careless human nature may desire to dance through the years, but it cannot. The onslaughts come, and to keep one's feet, to rise superior to conditions, to stand greater than circumstances, is to live truly.

The highest philosophies, however, have missed their way through looking largely to the human mind to supply its own strength. They have drawn from a reservoir soon exhausted; have looked for remedy where there is none. The intellect, the will, the affections, even at their best, cannot of themselves and unaided solve the problem of human woe; to the divine Mind alone men must turn for final refuge. And the Scriptural records which make plain man's relation to God, urge his dependence upon God, instruct him how to find God, transcend all philosophies and dogmas and creeds. Their teaching brings within the apprehension of men the thoughts which collectively composed the thinking of Christ Jesus, and brings home to men the truth that nothing less than the Christ-mind is greater than circumstances.

Let any strong and good man review his experiences, and he will recall many unhappy times when his courage or his patience failed him. And why? Because he thought his strength and his goodness were in and of himself, and so he came to the end of them. Let this same man, however, begin to understand and to adopt into his own thinking the infinite and infinitely right thoughts which originate in divine Mind, and he has identified himself mentally with thought-processes which will never fail him; for the source of his strength and goodness is now infinite and inexhaustible, inasmuch as he is seeking to express God's goodness just as fast as he can discover and reflect it. Christ Jesus must have meant this, surely, when he said that he and the Father were one; that he sought the will of the Father who sent him; that the

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

Son could do nothing of himself, but what he saw the Father do.

The highest interpretation of Christianity, then, gives us the law and rule and action of the superiority to circumstances which all great men have sought. In spiritual thinking, thinking governed by God and not by human will or intellect or desires, lies our help. And again differing from many philosophies and philosophers, this true Christian teaching bids us not to run away from trials or to become stoical toward them; but rather to bring out spiritual understanding to bear upon them and so to expel sin and suffering and all annoyances small or great from our experiences.

It is in the office, the workshop, the street, the schoolroom, the drawing-room, the nursery, and the kitchen that we need our courage and our patience; for here we spend our time and do our work and meet our annoyances. So it is here we need God, for we must draw from the great heart of an endless unchanging Love, abide and abound in it, in order to be greater than the circumstances that would undo us. On the one side runs a constant temptation to fretfulness, ill temper, criticism, faultfinding, to fear and worry and fatigue; on the other stands the loving assurance that thought lifted to the plane of infinite Love brings Love to bear upon the temptation of the moment to melt it away.

Again Marcus Aurelius wrote, "Consider how much more often you suffer from your anger and grief than from those very things for which you are angry and grieved." Truly, not circumstances, but what we make of circumstances, harms us. The way we take things decides what they shall be to us or do to us. He who determines that, whatever else he loses, he need not lose his peace of mind, stands victor over any situation. Over and over again, however, it has been brought home to us that without God we cannot always keep our peace. Then ought we not to welcome as God's greatest gift the understanding of truth which reveals our peace in Him and shows us how to become one with it?

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

The whole question is indeed mental. He who leans upon God in his market or his workshop, she who takes the presence of God into the humblest duties of her home, does it by thinking spiritual thoughts instead of material thoughts. God is divine Mind, Spirit, everywhere present; God is wholly good, neither creating nor knowing nor supporting anything evil; so divine Mind is entirely good, and is brought into our experiences as we think spiritual and good thoughts. If friction, accident, failure, delay, or any other evil threatens us, we can at once measure it against divine Mind; decide that it does not spring from this Mind and so has no power and no right place; and then refuse to think it, see it, or have it, because our loyalty to godlikeness compels us to reject everything from our thoughts that does not express God's nature and power and presence.

Refusing to entertain mentally any kind of trouble, it loses foothold and must eventually disappear. Should any one doubt that correcting thought according to God's law changes our actual experiences, let him read Paul's words to the Romans: "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." There is but one way; and this appearing of spiritualized thinking, correcting human turmoil and unrest, does reveal man superior to trouble, because God, the source of all right thought, is Himself greater than all the passing circumstances of earth.

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

WHY GROW OLD?

THE ancient Italian city of Ravenna, situated some miles from the Adriatic Sea, was protected from invasion by a long stretch of shallow water through which a channel was marked by posts projecting above the surface. When an enemy threatened from the sea, these posts were pulled out, and the city was thus saved from its foes, who could find no safe channel for approach.

Along the course of the human experiences of all of us are set the mile-posts of events and anniversaries whose recurrence marks the flight of time. These posts are not planted by time, but set by ourselves, ignorant or heedless of the fact that we are thus marking an open channel for the enemy we call age-limitation to enter from the sea of human beliefs. The passing of time is a mortal belief which lies wholly outside the realm of infinite Mind, wherein one day is as a thousand years. The trend of habit and custom is to admit and expect certain changes in physique and mentality with the passing of years. Up to a certain or uncertain point these changes are declared to be for the betterment of the individual, bringing strength and development of body and mind; but after maturity is reached, this laudable belief gradually gives way to the baneful one of deterioration and impairment.

The Christian Scientist can find no warrant in his religion for granting legitimacy or credence to any such beliefs. He knows that man, made in God's image and likeness, has no part in either accretion or decadence; that he has always stood at the point of perfection, and will always there remain. He knows that man, having all good, lacks nothing, and his heritage of good being eternal, he can never be deprived of any part of it, either by age or any other invention of the adversary. Man, in Christian Science, need therefore have no apprehension over advancing years, for while they should bring to him wisdom, they can take from him nothing that he would not voluntarily relinquish. But because of the heedlessness or indifference of mortals

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

to man's real relationship with God, they are continually driving new posts to mark the line of ingress for the enemy. They tick off each recurring birthday with more and more solemnity, and might often catch themselves looking backward and comparing what they think they cannot do now with what they once could do so well, and in other ways implanting marks of age where none belong.

It does not take much understanding of Christian Science to carry a man beyond the point of boasting of these things, or of mildly glorying in the empty distinction which seniority brings. Most of us have taken out of our vocabulary such moss-grown expressions as, "When I was younger I could do so and so," or, "Just wait until you are as old as I am and then see," and other similar impeditive expressions arising from self-justification and the like; but apart from these we have a long line of posts to pull out if we would obliterate the channel marked out in our own consciousness in the days of our bondage to mortal belief. It is not enough that we no longer speak of our age, or talk of the profitless past, or openly bewail our lack of physical agility; it is of slight consequence to the individual how tightly he may muzzle his lips, if he gives free rein to his thought. The man who never speaks of age and its accompaniments, but neglects to rise above it in his thought, is much in the predicament of the amateur architect we read about, who built his house without a staircase. It looked all right from the outside, but when he wanted to go up higher he found he had neglected an absolute necessity.

There is one sure method of rising above the aggressive suggestions of age, and that is by keeping ever in consciousness man's true relationship with God. The psalmist says, after speaking of the mutations of mortal sense, "But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." To this he adds, "The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee." Man as God's reflection manifests only the qualities and attributes that are God-given. He has unfailing strength, permanent activity, unvarying sagacity. Our revered Leader says: "Man in Science is neither young nor old. He has neither birth nor death. . . . Even Shakespeare's poetry

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

pictures age as infancy, as helplessness and decadence, instead of assigning to man the everlasting grandeur and immortality of development, power, and prestige" (Science and Health, p. 244). The Christian Scientist finds it essential to his well-being to keep this continually in his thought and to assert incisively his heritage of man's spiritual faculties whenever contrary arguments and suggestions intrude themselves. Whatever sensible aids he may employ to this end are commendable. Hence he should cultivate in thought and expression, juvenescence in demeanor and vigor, sociability in association and inclination.

No one need retire to the chimney-corner, no matter how many years may seemingly have passed over his head, for he is still God's image and likeness. Years should always bring sapience, but never decrepitude. Unresisting submission to the universal belief about the inevitable approach of senescence should never be regarded as a necessity, much less a virtue. The getting ready for it by withdrawal from usual occupations, changing one's customary attire, adopting the cane habit, retirement from blithesome fellowship, has been in times past regarded as a natural if not an admirable procedure; but such courses are to be shunned as the allies of age, the accessories of senility.

The achievements of so many of the world's greatest minds and keenest intellects after the riper seasons of longevity have been reached by them, should be a rebuke to those who interpret all changes after a certain age as sure evidence of decadence. Longfellow delivering his "*De Senectute*" on his seventieth birthday, Tennyson composing his immortal lines "Crossing the Bar" at eighty, Plato with pen in hand at eighty-one, Cato learning Greek at the same age, Humboldt completing his "*Cosmos*" in his ninetieth year, John Wesley at eighty-two in the midst of his activities saying, "It is twelve years now since I have felt any such sensation as fatigue," and our own Holmes lecturing in foreign lands in his eighties, — these are all familiar instances which show clearly that age beliefs are neither compulsory nor legitimate. Such instances could be multiplied

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

indefinitely, but the student in Christian Science may find them all overshadowed in the eventful record of the revered Founder of his religion, Mary Baker Eddy, who in her eighty-ninth year, with spiritual insight and bodily vigor, directed the policy and supervised the affairs of the most remarkable religious movement of modern times. Did not Christ Jesus say, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever"?

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

PROBLEM OF THE HICKORY TREE

A CERTAIN hickory tree which shades our lawn has lately been the means of teaching so valuable a lesson that its story is here told for the benefit of others who, figuratively speaking, may have hickory trees on their own premises.

Each year when the arrival of spring causes the other trees to put forth their leaves, this one stands for weeks in gaunt and bare unloveliness. The sun may shine its brightest, the soft winds may blow, the warm summer showers may beat as they will, but there is no response; while all around is growing green and beautiful, it alone remains coldly aloof, taking no part and apparently wishing to have no share in the general awakening. Yet we are never concerned about it, for we know that after a while tiny buds will appear, which will swell and grow without unfolding until they stand all over its gnarled branches like stiff little Christmas candles. Then perhaps there comes a night of rain followed by a day of brilliant sunshine, and lo, a miracle is wrought! The Christmas candles soften and uncurl into baby leaves, which hang for a few days like feathery tassels, and then imperceptibly assume such shape and color that, almost before we are aware, our stubborn old hickory tree stands clothed in a garment of green which is a delight all the season long.

Once, as we were enjoying its luxuriant shade, the thought came, Why can we not be just as patient with our loved ones who are having their struggle in getting started, as we are with trees? People, as well as trees, have characteristics of their own, and is there any occasion to fret and worry because all mental processes are not alike? The violet pushes through the wet leaves at almost the first breath of springtime, while the rose requires weeks of care and vigilance on the part of the gardener before it reaches its full splendor. Yet who can say that one is more lovely than the other? Is the violet in any position to criticize the rose, or should the rose judge and condemn the violet? Each is simply unfolding after its own nature, and neither self-righteousness on the

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

part of the violet, nor self-condemnation on the part of the rose, will facilitate the growth of either. Then shall we have less patience with our brother and our sister than we have with the grass of the field, "which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven"?

Suppose we look back and honestly ask ourselves if we have always used the same simple common sense in our dealings with people that we used in regard to our hickory tree. As we passed back and forth beneath its bare branches, did it ever occur to us, for instance, to upbraid it for its slowness, or to stop and inquire why it did not begin to get green like the other trees? I am quite certain that we never shed tears over it, nor did we nag at it, and make its life miserable by continually begging it to put out a few leaves — "just to please us!" Neither did we call its attention to the weeping willow next door, and remark how happy those people must be with a fine tree like that in their yard. We just went quietly along, like reasonable people, attending to our own affairs, and feeling sure that the hickory tree was doing the same. Because it grew in our yard and belonged to us was no reason why it should lose its individuality, nor its absolute freedom to work out its own salvation in its own way.

Mrs. Eddy has reminded us of the need to "remember that the world is wide; that there are a thousand million different human wills, opinions, ambitions, tastes, and loves; that each person has a different history, constitution, culture, character, from all the rest; that human life is the work, the play, the ceaseless action and reaction upon each other of these different atoms" (Miscellaneous Writings, p. 224). Then why grow discouraged? Because no evidence of a change is visible to the material senses does not mean that it may not already be taking place in human consciousness. No one saw the inward struggle through which the tree had to pass before the hard bark softened sufficiently to let the first bud appear; and in like manner no one sees the conflict through which some natures grope their way toward the light. The heart's innermost processes are not always revealed, even to those nearest and dearest, but in this trying interval of waiting can we not have sufficient faith in the ultimate outcome to be a little more

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

patient, a little more loving?

Perhaps, however, the argument comes: "It is my very love which makes me impatient. If I did not love so much I should not care." But is it really love, O troubled heart? Let us be sure on this point, for no sentiment is so likely to be misconstrued. If we probe the heart deeply enough, that which we fondly believe to be love for the tree sometimes turns out to be only love for ourselves, — a desire that the tree shall grow green because it will make our yard prettier, and in consequence we shall be happier. Before we begin to pity ourselves too industriously, and sadly maintain that we have done "everything we can," suppose we ask ourselves if we have done the one thing which is the hardest to do of all, — so hard, in fact, that some of us never even attempt it, — and that is, to let go of our own sense of personal responsibility in the matter.

Suppose we try a little harder to remember that it is not "our" tree at all, but God's. Suppose we try to make its stubbornness, its ugliness, its perversity, less of a reality, and to remember instead that the real tree and the real man are perfect ideas in Mind, and that as such God is ever conscious of them. Suppose we try to remember that God's work is already done; that the hickory tree, to Him, is already as beautiful as the weeping willow, because He can see that which is still hidden from our dull eyes, — the perfect, finished spiritual creation; and that in His way (not ours) and in His time (not ours) this eternal fact will be made manifest to human consciousness.

Meanwhile do we honestly desire to see it work out its problem? Then suppose we step aside and give it a chance. It is possible that the one thing it needs is just to be let alone, and it is more than probable that this is the one thing which we have never done, for mortal mind is never more agreeably employed than when attempting to manage other people's affairs. Suppose we stand aside just for a while. Self-righteousness may have been casting a darker, colder shadow upon it than we have ever realized. Self-love, too, which Mrs. Eddy tells us is "more opaque than a solid body" (Science and Health, p. 242), has

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

sometimes kept the light from reaching things far more precious than hickory trees. The human mind has also a strange trait called self-justification; but if we pray earnestly enough, we can free ourselves even from this. Do not let us crowd the slowly unfolding idea, for overanxiety has a smothering effect at times. Let us get ourselves far enough in the background to allow the free winds of heaven to blow and the warm sunshine to do its work. It was God's tree before it was ours. Can we not trust Him to take care of it?

Take courage, wistful gardener! Have weeks and months gone by and still your tree stands without response? It may be that tomorrow's dawn will see the first faint bud appear; and in the mean time there is yet one thing which we can do, one final test so crucial that only those who have borne it can understand what it involves. Do we really love? Have we really the best interests of the loved one at heart? Then prove it. That which is truly love, and not its counterfeit, can not only

Speak the word that's needed, yet
Can hold its peace as well; nor doth forget
When things seem wrong, love shows itself most great
By sometimes being willing just to wait.

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

"SONGS IN THE NIGHT"

IT was Job who spoke of "God my maker, who giveth songs in the night." Sometimes the human mind has an enlarged sense of its troubles in the night; things proverbially look worse then than when the coming daylight puts fears to flight — so common consent says. When the heart can rejoice in the night watches because of God's goodness, it means that gratitude is sweetening all existence. "Songs in the night" bring thought close to God, and shut away from us whatever would oppress.

Symbolically the song in the night means much to us. In the seasons of mental darkness, when fear or grief or discouragement press upon us, a song in the heart carries thought triumphantly through the hard place. A different thing it is from being elated over material success or gain; a different thing also from personal pleasure or good fortune of any kind. The spirit which can be grateful for blessings received, even when trials are multiplied, is the spirit of the robin singing in the rain; of the early crocus under late winter snows. It is the spirit of prophecy, of faith, of confidence in all things good; the courage which looks beyond today's evidence to tomorrow's promise. The song in the night is, indeed, from God, for it is nothing less than spiritual uplifting and nothing less than a gift of God.

It is not always easy to remain undismayed; not always possible to stand every instant of the day or the week or the year untempted by discouragement. In the present state of human affairs there is work to be done, a hill to be climbed. Living is a problem, to be solved by applying to its every detail the action of divine Principle. Things as they appear are far from perfect, and to bring daily life to perfection means that divine Mind must displace ultimately every human thought and thing.

It is no wonder, then, that in so great a work the suggestions of evil would endeavor to weaken the hands of the toilers — not

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

surprising that there are "night-times" in our journey from material education to spiritual understanding. To every one who strives for the highest right, there come at times disheartened seasons; and these will very likely persist, though with less and less force and frequency, until thought grasps the supreme power and presence of good and comes to fear evil not at all.

Here Christian Science brings to human thought "songs in the night;" songs at all times, whether the way be for the moment dark or bright. Its fundamental teaching that God is good and that God is the only power, brings reassurance to the darkest hour. If in any trouble we can be assured that, whatever the appearance for the time, the trouble has nothing to sustain it and the forces of divine Love are operating to destroy trouble and to deliver us, a thread of rejoicing runs through the experience and it cannot be wholly dark. Trouble without God and trouble with some understanding of God, however small, to sustain us, are two different things. The first might be considered actual trouble; the second is a place in which God may be sought and found, an opportunity for divine Mind to enter and prevail and save to the uttermost. So it is not trouble after all, in the last analysis, but a holy place in which the earnest heart may meet divine Love face to face. And indeed all trouble, soon or late, brings thought to hear the song in the night, for trial and sorrow cannot long endure without God's answer to our pleading.

You who may think you have heard no song, have you really listened for it? Have you counted your blessings, nursed your gratitude, gone out to make others happy, though unhappy yourself? Have you believed that God is good, that faith is rewarded, that prayer is answered? Have you really asked God to help you, expecting help? If you have, your dark hours have been cheered; and when you know enough of God's power and presence they will be transformed. Christian Science comes to meet you and to make the song you have heard or have longed to hear the most certain and dependable thing in your life. This teaching takes nothing from Christianity, adds no new thing to it. It simply unfolds the Science of Christianity; reduces to

ENVIRONMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

human comprehension and practice the law of God as Christ Jesus taught and lived it. This teaching reveals man in God's likeness to be spiritual, eternal, immortal, now and forever triumphant over sin, disease, and death; uncovers evil, matter, mortality, as man's counterfeit, a false claim and claimant to be denied and cast out; discovers the whole question of living to be a question of thinking, and shows us how to think divine thoughts, godlike thoughts, to the destruction of thoughts material, evil, and diseased.

So the student of the highest Christianity hears always the song in the night and in the day. There is no time when he cannot hear it if he keeps true to what he knows of divine Love. Perhaps at times he is as sorely discouraged as before he first heard the song; at other times the sense of fear or loss or sorrow may beat upon him, for he is still somewhat involved in things human. But always he can listen to the voice of Truth, God, assuring him that good is supreme and will eventually triumph if he leaves self and fear and greed and wilfulness behind him to follow the best he knows of good. And always he will follow and obey it if he really loves good better than evil, pressing forward to the promised consciousness of "God who understood," in which there shall be no night at all.